

# 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Garden City Multi-cultural Conference 2000

March 30-31, 2000

*Trip Report*

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## Background:

Garden City is the fastest growing city in the western half of Kansas, and its population has increased from 14,709 in 1970 to 29,876 in 1998, according to <http://www.garden-city.org>. Much of this growth occurred during the early 1980s and 1990s. Garden City, KS, experienced an influx of ethnic and cultural diversity in the early 1980's as a result of the meat processing industry and agricultural industry.

We were advised that racial/ethnic minorities comprise 51% of the population of Garden City, KS. A majority of the minority group are either Hispanic or Asian. They also have a large population of immigrants from Germany.

Approximately ?? persons registered for the conference. A majority of the audience were health care providers, social service providers, educators and/or students from Garden City Community College(GCCC).

**Purpose of Conference:** To increase cultural awareness of the communities in which we live and to share successful approaches to building multi-ethnic skills for effective organizations, such as health care and social services.

**Who:** Althea Moses and Lori Walker gave an Environmental Justice presentation focusing on children's environmental health issues; Monica Espinosa and Demetra Salisbury ran an informational booth and handed out materials for teachers and health care providers on children's environmental health issues.

**Why:** Part of EPA Region 7's mission includes 1) Working with stakeholders to begin voluntary approaches to create better environmental conditions, 2) Conducting environmental education and outreach to the public and regulated community to enable them to become better environmental stewards, and 3) Ensuring all our nation's communities have equal protection from pollution. Attending this conference, which is designed to heighten awareness of other cultures while incorporating environmental healthcare information and seeking out the environmental health needs of a multi-cultural community, is an optimum venue to accomplish this mission.

## Highlights:

1. **Dr. Jeannie Chavez-Martinez**, Pittsburg State, gave a passionate presentation about the future of the U.S. and its diverse populations, focusing on how it's important to teach about various cultural impacts on the U.S., and how the quality of life is inextricably bound by all children, regardless of difficulties and differences. We all have co-responsibility to help determine the future by evaluating our beliefs and realizing that

despite our differences; we all have common threads, according to Chavez-Martinez.

2. **Various concurrent sessions-** For example) A panel of reps. from City of Garden City, USD #457, Finney County Community Learning Center, and Mexican American Ministries Health Services, discussed changes in Garden City and why the community succeeds. Several successes are because of the integration of various services and coordinated effort to assist newcomers. One notable establishment is the community learning center, which helps immigrants get their lives in order by teaching them English free of charge and providing them with a connection for health and social services.
3. **Multi-cultural Festival at Victor Ornelas Elementary School** - This event served as a fund raiser for the school and provided colorful decorations, ethnic food and dance. The festival was well attended by the conference participants and the community. Most notably, all the signs in the school were in several languages, such as Spanish, Laotian, and Vietnamese.
4. **Cultural Strand** - Conference participants attended one of four cultural strands, Asian, African American, Hispanic, and Poverty. EPA participants attended the Asian and Hispanic strands, hearing about different people's experiences in the SW part of Kansas. Several speakers emphasized getting an education; learning about different cultures; having role models for the youth; teaching traditions, and talking to each other to learn about the past while focusing on the ever-changing future.
5. **Robert Hernandez speech** - This national syndicated columnist addressed the ways that various ethnic groups are changing the U.S. and vice versa. Hernandez stated that an important factor is for different cultures to define themselves and to be aware of common ties to other cultures, such as language and customs. He also emphasized that the U.S. should focus on helping the disadvantaged regardless of race, because affirmative action reinforces the degrading notion that different cultures cannot make it without special services. Instead we should focus on our cultural strengths and hold up a new mirror to our children which reflects a positive image of different people, instead of reinforcing a hoodlum, derelict, or other negative stereotype.

#### Future Actions:

Garden City, KS is indeed a unique community within Region 7 and could serve as a model for other communities experiencing multi-cultural change. Perhaps EPA could give presentations or host a listening tour to assess the community's environmental needs.